

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4563

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 6056

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB ET

SUBJECT: EPMG CLOSES CELU HEADQUARTERS: REACTIONS AND NEXT
STEPS

NAIROBI FOR CALDWELL

REF: ADDIS 5928 AND PREVIOUS

1. ETHIOPIAN HERALD MAY 22 CARRIES RATHER DEFENSIVE EPMG
"CLARIFICATION" ON SUBJECT CLOSURE. CLARIFICATION, ASCRIBED TO
PMAC, STATES THAT CLOSURE CELU HEADQUARTERS SHOULD NOT BE
"MISCONSTRUED" AS ABOLITION OF CONFEDERATION. CLARIFICATION
REPEATS THAT AUTHORITIES ACTED IN WAKE GROWING RIVALRY BETWEEN
"TWO FACTIONS CELU'S LEADERSHIP VYING FOR POWER." INTERESTINGLY,
IT ASSERTS THAT IN CLOSING CELU HEADQUARTERS "THE GOVERNMENT
DID NOT NEGLECT ITS INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS." STATEMENT
CONTINUES THAT ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE FOR REPS OF CELU'S
CONSTITUENT UNIONS TO MEET AND ELECT NEW CONFEDERATION LEADERS
"IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S DIRECTIVES." THE STATEMENT
ADDS BALDLY "THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT INTERFERE IN THE AFFAIRS OF
ORGANIZED LABOR AND ITS UNIONS, NOR HAS ANY INTENTION OF DOING
SO." STATEMENT INFORMS HERALD'S READERS THAT PMAC MEMBERS BRIEFED
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VARIOUS LOCAL UNIONS IN ADDIS ON GOVERNMENT POLICIES TOWARDS

CELU AND TOLD THEM TO SELECT REPRESENTATIVES WHO WOULD MEET SHORTLY WITH GOVERNMENT MEN TO DRAW UP THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ELECTION OF NEW CELU LEADERS. CLARIFICATION CLOSES ON IDEOLOGICAL NOTE WITH STATEMENT THAT "HENCEFORTH WORKERS SHOULD ATTAIN POLITICAL AWARENESS AND ORGANIZE THEMSELVES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE POLITICAL DIRECTIVES OF THE GOVERNMENT SO THAT THEY WILL BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO PROMOTE THEIR REVOLUTION UNDER THE BANNER OF ETHIOPIAN SOCIALISM."

2. ACCORDING AALC'S BAURMANN, EPMG'S LABOR COMMISSIONER TEFERRA WAS DEEPLY DISTRESSED BY GOVERNMENT'S MAY 19 CLOSURE OF CELU HEADQUARTERS. TEFERRA REPORTEDLY THOUGHT THAT DECISION OUTGROWTH OF REASONING IN CONCERNED ELEMENTS OF DIRG THAT CELU'S ELECTED LEADERS HAD LOST MEMBERSHIP'S SUPPORT, WHILE THOSE TRYING TO REPLACE THEM HAD NOT BEEN ELECTED. TEFERRA SEEMED WORRIED THAT IDEOLOGUES WOULD NOW MOVE TO EXPLOIT THE SITUATION AND BAURMANN FEARED THAT CALL FOR ELECTION NEW LABOR LEADERSHIP MORE IN TUNE WITH ETHIOPIAN SOCIALISM COULD PROVE FIRST STEP IN PROCESS DENATURING CELU FOR PURPOSE RESHAPING ETHIOPIAN LABOR MOVEMENT TO CONFORM TO COUNTRY'S NEW SOCIALIST NORMS. BAURMANN SAW CELU'S FIRST AND SECOND VICE-PRESIDENTS, TESFA AND ALEM, MAY 20 AND 21. LATTER COULD OFFER NO INSIGHTS ON LIKELY NEXT STEPS AND SEEMED PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH LYING LOW SO AS TO KEEP OUT OF JAIL.

3. WE HAVE CONFIRMED THAT DIRG DID, INDEED, SEND TEAMS TO UNIONIZED BUSINESSES IN ADDIS AREA ON MAY 20. OTHERS SAID BE ENROUTE ASMARA, DIRE DAWA, NAZARETH ETC. TEAMS DID URGE LOCAL UNIONS TO ELECT NEW REPRESENTATIVES ASAP. NEW REPRESENTATIVES, DIRG MEMBERS SAID, WOULD BE SUMMONED TO ADDIS SEMINAR WHERE THEY WOULD RECEIVE GOVERNMENT DIRECTIVES ON ELECTION NEW CELU LEADERSHIP. NEW UNION REPS ALSO EXPECTED SELECT ETHIOPIAN LABOR REPRESENTATIVES ASAP IN PREPARATION FOR EARLY JUNE GENEVA ILO MEETING.

4. INFORMATION ON INITIAL RANK-AND-FILE REACTIONS TO CELU HEADQUARTERS CLOSURE REACHING US IS VARIED. WE UNDERSTAND THAT EAL UNIONS GAVE DIRG REPRESENTATIVES A VERY HARD TIME OVER CLOSURE ACTION (SEPTTEL). METAHARA WORKERS WERE ALSO DESCRIBED AS HOSTILE. WONJI SUGAR WORKERS LISTENED TO EXPLANATION BY DIRG REPS OF REASONS FOR CELU HEADQUARTERS CLOSURE. CONFIDENTIAL

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THEY DID NOT REACT SPECIFICALLY TO EXPLANATION BUT COUNTERED WITH DEMANDS FOR SUSPENSION OF SURTAX RECENTLY LEVIED UPON ALL ETHIOPIAN LABOR. PRESS, OF COURSE, ASSERTS WORKERS IN FULL SUPPORT OF DIRG ACTION.

5. WE HAVE SOME REASON BELIEVE THAT EVEN SOME DIRG ELEMENTS UPSET BY IDEOLOGICAL SHRILLNESS OF MAY 19 PRESS TREATMENT CELU HEADQUARTERS CLOSURE DECISION, PARTICULARLY ATTACK ON FOREIGN

AID TO CELU. TEFERRA DEPLORED TONE OF PRESS ARTICLE TO BAURMANN:
"WE WILL CONTINUE TO NEED ASSISTANCE FROM ALL SOURCES FOR
CONSIDERABLE TIME TO COME." ILO'S MESFIN (ONE OF THE FOUR
CELU FOUNDERS) TOLD BAURMANN THAT THESE EVENTS DO NOT REFLECT
INTRA-CELU FIGHT BUT STRUGGLE WITHIN DIRG BETWEEN LATTER'S
MODERATES AND PROGRESSIVE RADICALS.

6. COMMENT: IF CAUSE OF RUCKUS IS -- AS ASSERTED -- SIMPLE
EXASPERATION WITHIN DIRG WITH CELU IN-FIGHTING AND MOVE
TRIGGERS REASONABLY STRAIGHTFORWARD ELECTIONS, LABOR MOVEMENT
COULD CONCEIVABLY EMERGE STRENGTHENED FROM THIS EPISODE.
HOWEVER, IF RADICALS HAVE THEIR WAY, THE STRENGTH TO OVERRIDE
OPPOSITION IN AT LEAST SOME UNIONS, AND THE MOMENTUM TO PRESS
AHEAD WITH ATTEMPT FOIST MORE PLIANT LEADERSHIP ON CELU IN
PREPARATION FOR ITS TRANSFORMATION, DIFFICULT DAYS COULD LIE
AHEAD.
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